

Grooming

What type grooming does my kitten need?

Grooming should be an essential part of your kitten's life. If you begin when they are young, they will become accustomed to it early in life and will be easier to groom when they mature. They may resist at first, but soon come to enjoy the extra holding and petting you give them at grooming time. If you have fun, chances are they will, too!

For longhaired cats, use a long-toothed metal comb and a stiff brush to manipulate the haircoat against the way it lays so it is fluffy when you finish. Groom a shorthaired cat with a soft rubber brush or hand mitt with short bristles. Longhaired cats should be groomed daily and shorthaired cats at least once or twice a week, to help control, to some extent, your cat's shedding.

A cat sheds to a certain degree all year long, with heavy shedding in spring and fall. Grooming is especially important during these seasons to rid your cat's coat of dead hair. A sleek, lustrous coat reflects the good nutrition and good care you give them.

What are hairballs?

Cats usually do an excellent job of keeping themselves clean, but even the neatest cat can fall victim to troublesome hairballs. You may one day see your cat vomit a long, dark mass—commonly called a hairball—made up of hair your cat has ingested. Both long and shorthaired cats can have hairballs and the best solution is prevention. You can help eliminate hairballs by careful and regular brushing and combing. If hairballs continue to be a problem, remedies are available from your veterinarian.

Can I trim my kitten's sharp toenails?

Kittens have very sharp toenails. They can be trimmed with your regular fingernail clippers or with nail trimmers made for dogs and cats. If you take too much off the nail, you will get into the "quick" and bleeding and pain will occur. If this happens, neither you nor your cat will want to do this again. Therefore, a few points are helpful:

- a. If your cat has clear or white nails, you can see the pink of the quick through the nail. Avoid the pink area, and you should be out of the quick.
- b. If your cat has black nails, you will not be able to see the quick so only cut 1/32" (1 mm) of the nail at a time until the cat begins to get sensitive. The sensitivity will usually occur before you are into the blood vessel. With black nails, it is likely that you will get too close on at least one nail.
- c. If your cat has some clear and some black nails, use the average clear nail as a guide for cutting the black ones.
- d. When cutting nails, use sharp trimmers. Dull trimmers tend to crush the nail and cause pain even if you are not in the quick.
- e. You should always have styptic powder available. This is sold in pet stores under several trade names, but it will be labeled for use in trimming nails.

My kitten is already becoming destructive. What can be done?

There are three options that you should consider: frequent nail clipping, nail shields and surgical declawing.

The nails may be clipped according to the instructions above. However, your cat's nails will regrow and become sharp again in about 4-7 days. Therefore, to protect your property, it will be necessary to clip them one to two times per week.

There are some commercially available products that are called nail caps (Soft Paws is the trade-name). These are generally made of smooth plastic and attach to the end of the nail with special glue. The nails are still present, but the caps prevent them from causing destruction. After 2-4 weeks the nails will grow enough that the caps will be shed. At that time, you should be prepared to replace them.

Surgical declawing is the removal of the nail at its base. This is done under general anesthesia. There is little post-surgical discomfort, especially when it is performed on a kitten. Contrary to the belief of some, this surgery causes minimal lameness and psychological damage. Actually, a declawed cat will not realize the claws are gone and will continue to "sharpen" the claws as normal without inflicting damage to your furniture. This surgery can be done as early as 12 weeks of age or anytime thereafter. It can also be done the same time as spaying or neutering. Once declawed, your cat should always live indoors since the ability to defend itself is compromised.